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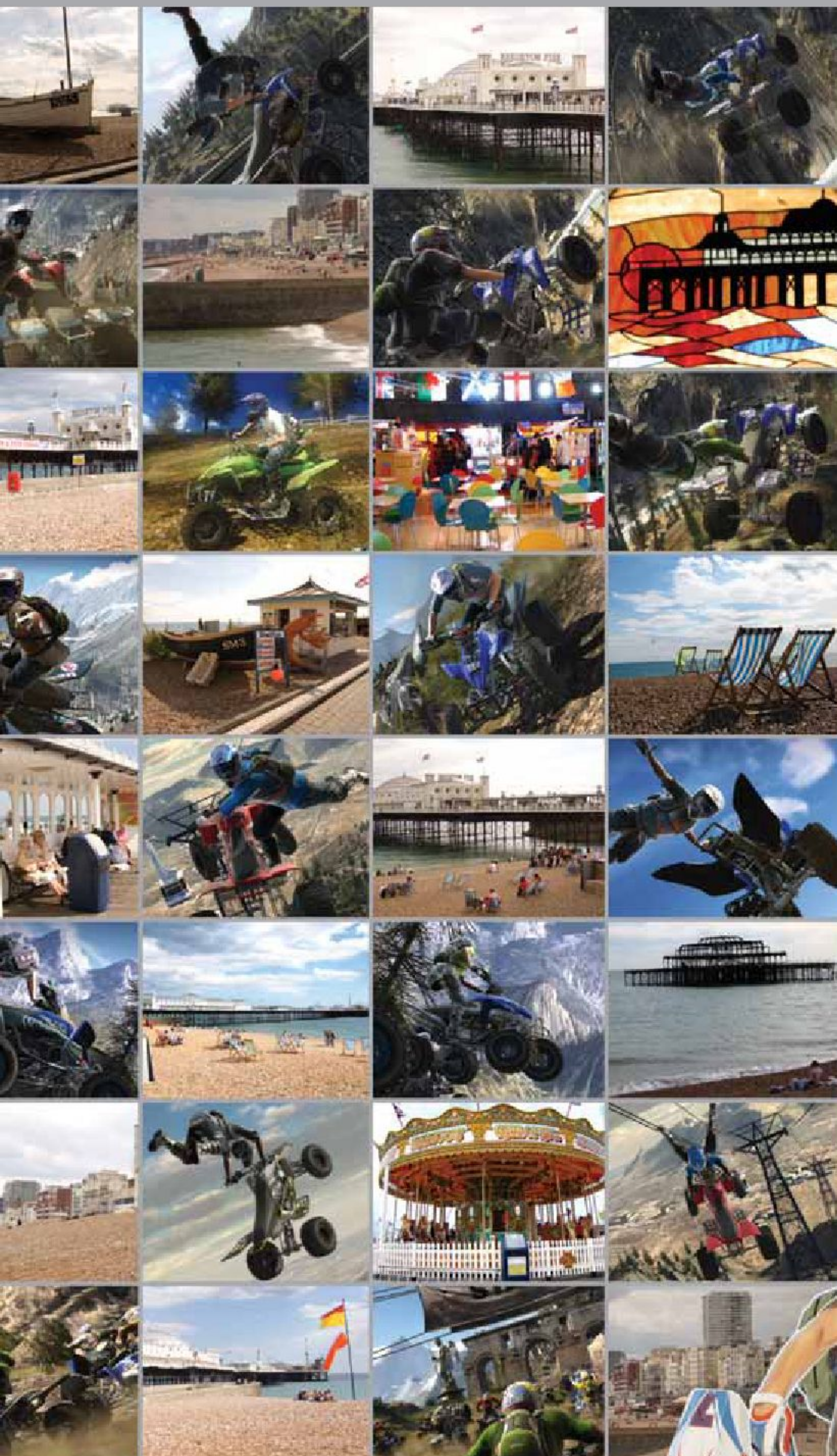
GET A CAREER THAT REACHES
NEW HEIGHTS AT BLACK ROCK





Introduction

There's no denying that Brighton, UK has become a hotspot for games talent. And when Disney Interactive Studios was looking to expand its internal studio portfolio in 2006, it's no surprise that one of the world's biggest entertainment companies chose to buy the Brighton-based outfit then known as Climax Racing. Established back in 1999, the studio quickly gained a reputation for creating racing titles that delivered award winning gameplay and huge appeal. Work on strong brands such as *MotoGP* and *ATV* proved the team could easily compete with any racing game developer in the world. Now named Black Rock Studio, the development team has been drawing considerable strength from Disney, which arguably owns the world's best characters with a tradition built upon excellence in animation. Indeed, Disney Interactive Studios' first new-IP racing title, *Pure*, is already showing signs of an exuberant and innovative experience unlike any other. With *Pure*, Black Rock is set to evolve everybody's perception of Disney Interactive Studios and broaden the company's audience in gaming. Across the following pages we find out more about the studio, its culture and why it, and home city Brighton, is a great place to build a games career...



Q&A: Tony Beckwith, GM & VP, Black Rock Studio



What makes Black Rock special?

Back in 1999 when we first came to Brighton we had the foresight to see the city would be a major focus for games development in the UK. We were also one of the first ever studios to specialise in a given genre. So I think

those two are key – our location and our dedicated genre. We feel by focusing on racing games we can produce a much better product – as proven with our previous games, and also with our new game *Pure*. Plus, we have a clear mantra – ‘focus, focus, focus’ – which Disney has really thrown its weight behind and helped us drive forward.

Pure has a very clear, original concept driving it – can you tell us more about the background to the game’s creation?

Disney had a lot of success with the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, which stretched the company in a number of ways, and proved its versatility. It was a box office smash, but based on new ideas. So the company wants to be similarly stretched in the video game arena.

With *Pure*, we are also trying to show a side of the Disney brand that people don’t expect. When we first announced the game people were surprised – but once you play it, see it, feel it, you realise it really works for Disney, alongside properties like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Wall-E* or even *High School Musical*. *Pure* is very much focused on the ‘Big Idea’ of exciting and outrageous stunts and jumps, rather than an approach that tries to do everything at once and ends up being nothing at all. That clear vision is something Disney has supported and means the game has been not only great to play, but great to make.

However we’re very much a two-product studio. *Pure* is just the beginning, just one of our two new IPs. Although

unannounced, our next game will be another brand new racing IP in an exciting new sub-genre for driving games and it will be as equally distinct and unique as *Pure* is.

What other benefits has Disney’s ownership brought to the studio since it acquired the team in 2006?

Disney didn’t want to mess with the culture we had. They made it clear they were not buying IP when they bought us, they were buying tech and talent.

Disney has given us full access to the depth and breadth of the creative talent and training within the company, and that feeds back into our core mission of creating focused fun in our games.

For instance we’ve been able to leverage the fact that we are part of the same company as Pixar. Several team members recently attended ‘Pixar University’. Our art team learned processes like sculpting, the latest computer graphics techniques, plus things like the culture and history of Pixar – even improvisational comedy. It was a whole range of activities. There are huge parallels between what we do and what Pixar does, so there have been great techniques we can learn from that team, and all the other complimentary organisations within Disney, which is a huge operation that covers theme parks and TV as well as film.

Overall, Disney is very much about fostering a focused and creative atmosphere for all the staff – it’s a business dominated by its talent, not the people at the top.

The studio is at the heart of the booming Brighton games development scene. How does that influence Black Rock?

When people are looking to build their games career they want to go where the quality of life is good. And what better place than Brighton? It’s youthful, vibrant, and bohemian. I’ve heard people call it ‘The San Francisco of Great Britain’, which is a good analogy. Brighton is a great city that is rich in culture and entertainment. And I think that feeds back into the working culture at the studio.



“I previously worked for Sega Racing Studio, well before they closed, but with Black Rock I was interested in the opportunity to advance my career further at an exciting studio which had solid backing. The studio has given me the chance to be creative in developing new ideas and provided the necessary support. The teams and departments are well staffed so you are able to spare the time to be creative.”

Andrew Hutchings
Lead Audio Programmer



Minigame Mania

Another aspect of the way Disney has supported Black Rock's need to flex its creative muscles was its recent 'mini game week'.

The team-building exercise asked everyone in the company to down tools, form teams and brainstorm ideas and build mini-games in five days. The move was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Disney higher-ups and is now being repeated at Vancouver-based sister studio Propaganda.

Essentially a way to fire-up ideas, stimulate new working relationships and invigorate the company, the initiative also had a side benefit in uncovering hidden creative talent and leadership qualities amongst the staff. And as Beckwith says, taking everyone off a game for a week is just one per cent of the project, "and if we can't do that, then we must be doing something wrong."



"I was working for Ubisoft Montreal as animation director but I decided to join Black Rock because it gave me the opportunity to make a world class game with an awesome team. Black Rock believes that we must move with the times and encourages learning and development. The best thing about working here is the feeling that you have pushed your skills further than any other developer this generation."

Gianni Malpeli
Lead Animator on Pure

Pure

Just another off-road racer? Think again. Black Rock believes its new racing game *Pure* is not competing with other offroad racing titles, such as Sony's *MotorStorm* or THQ's forthcoming *Baja*, because the focus is very much on trick-based racing. The team says comparisons with *SSX* are more accurate because the team's focus has always been on over the top thrills combined with dare-devil showing off.

"Every time we show press you can tell its getting people excited," enthuses studio head Tony Beckwith. "Their jaws just hit the ground. Nothing like this has been done with wheels before and wheels give you a lot more opportunity for fun driving dynamics. Cap that off with tricks and we've got a huge sub-genre."

Pure is all about that feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when gravity decides to leave your internal organs behind. Indeed, an early title for the game was 'Vertigo', and you can see why – *Pure* has some of the most beautifully realised outdoor tracks to grace next-gen hardware and they've all been designed to emphasise huge, exhilarating jumps and deep blue skies.

If it sounds like something you'd experience in a theme park then you'd not be far wrong. Disney couldn't be more

committed to this new IP and even arranged for members of the team to spend time at Disney Imagineering. "These are the guys that create the theme park rides," says Beckwith. "A really wacky, really creative bunch. And we've learned from that. If you think about it, theme park rides are quick one or two minute exhilarating experiences. And lap racing games are usually one or two minutes. It was this kind of exuberant experience we wanted to capture."

With thousands of trick combinations, over 50 events in the *Pure* World Tour mode, which take in several real world locales, plus a 16 player online battle mode, *Pure* is certainly not without depth.

But it's focused depth. As Beckwith points out, *Pure* is all about emphasising the thrills and tricks, not about throwing in every vehicle known to man.

"I like to use Gordon Ramsay as my analogy. He always preaches a small number of options on the menu, but make sure they are high quality options. Don't put too many ingredients into the dish or you will spoil it. Just make sure they are high quality ingredients. It's just as relevant for videogames too."

When Disney first acquired Climax Racing Studio few could have expected such a flamboyant and distinctive IP – now their alliance definitely looks like a recipe for success.



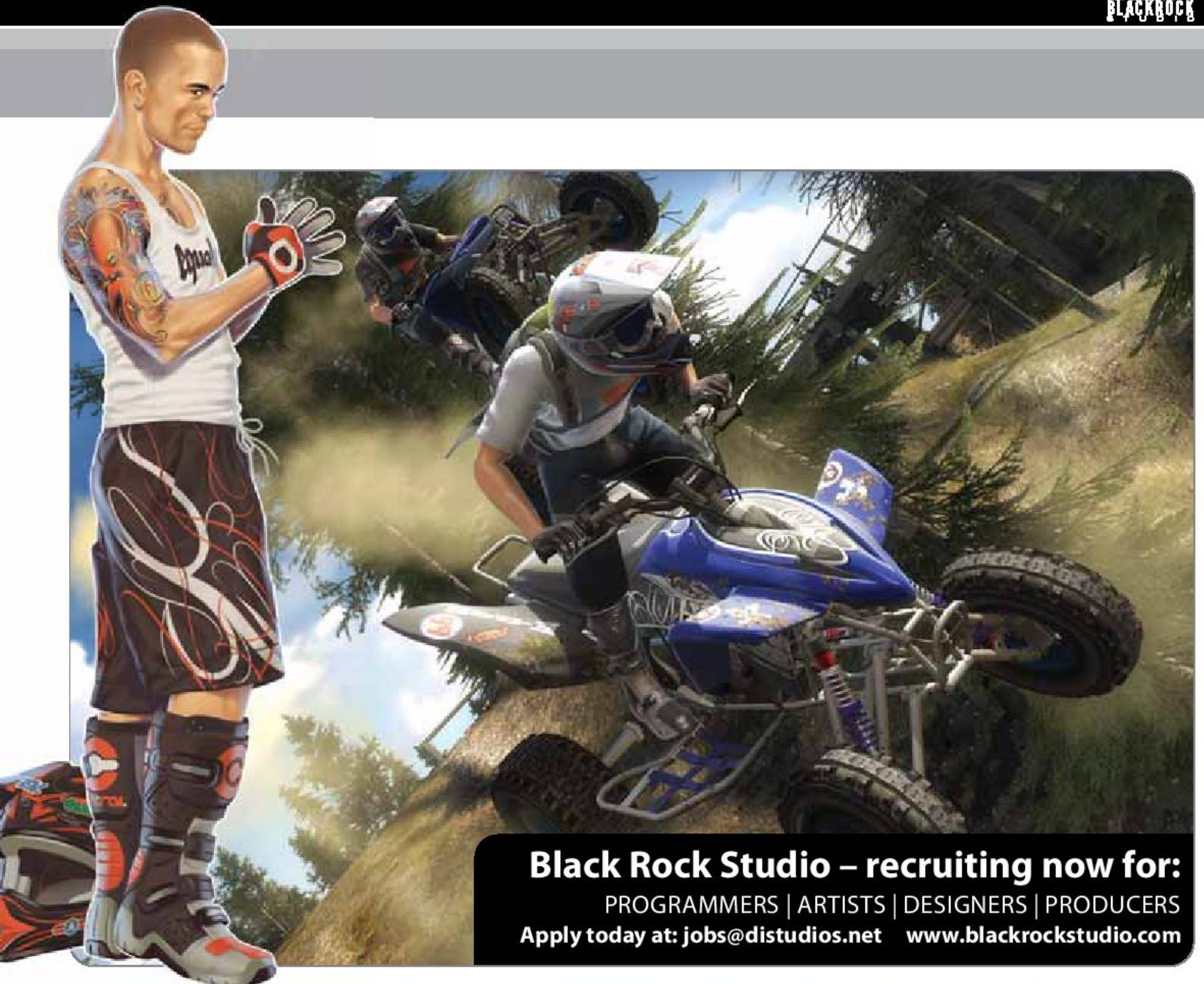
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"I previously worked with the *Burnout* team at Criterion Games, but being part of Disney means we can connect, not just with other game studios around the world like Avalanche and Propaganda, but with Pixar, ABC, ESPN and even Disney's theme park Imagineers. It's an incredible opportunity to hook up with some of the biggest creative and technical talent in entertainment. Plus, I've worked all over the country and Brighton beats everywhere else hands down."

Paul Glancey
Franchise Design Director, Unannounced project





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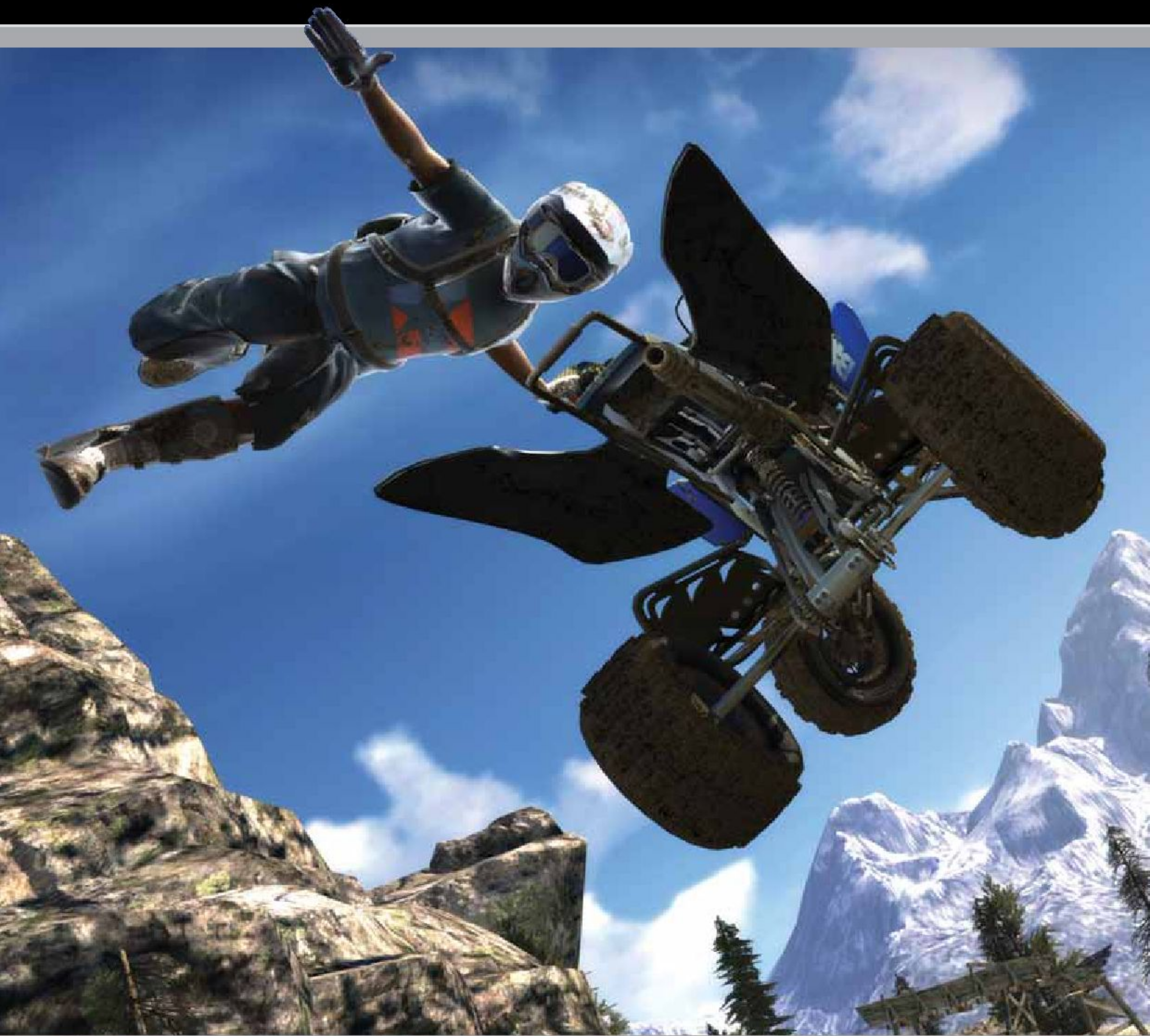
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"I came to Black Rock after short-term contract at the BBC and, prior to that, working as a programmer for over five years in the insurance industry. In Brighton I was looking for something where I could use my project management skills in a fun and challenging environment with plenty of room for progression. The studio employs some of the best people in the industry. Everyone has a huge pride in what they do and it shows in the superb quality of the products we produce here."

Clare Edmonds
Producer



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